

NSC BRIEFING

VENEZUELA

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I. Inter-service and military-civilian rivalries continue to threaten an overthrow of Larrazabal regime.

A. On Wednesday, Air Force General Castro Leon resigned as Defense Minister after failing to bid to assert political power for military.

1. He had been pressing for action against the Commies and leftist but non-commie Democratic Action, Venezuela's largest political party.

B. Demonstration by 100,000 civilians in defense of junta and its policies provoked Castro resignation.

C. New Defense Minister is career air force officer General Lopez, who was appointed chief of air force in January shortly after revolution.

1. Lopez, when head of air force, was regarded by Embassy as mere figurehead.

II. Probable results of attempted coup:

A. Successful joint action by civilian groups, including yesterday's strikes likely to enhance prestige of Commies.

1. Other parties' defense of Commies probably prompted by belief that crackdown against Commies will extend to others.

B. Should junta feel strong enough to make other changes of cabinet not to army's liking, army may feel it must move against junta--result, much bloodshed.